

THE GOSPEL-MINISTRY ILLUSTRATED.

A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT THE

O R D I N A T I O N

OF THE

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S A L I S B U R Y,

NOV. 9, 1791.

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T H O R N T O N

N E W B U R Y P O R T :

PRINTED BY JOHN MYCALL, FOR WILLIAM HOYT.



A N
O R D I N A T I O N - S E R M O N .

2 COR. V. 18.

—THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION.

L O N G before the foundations of the earth were laid, when there was no other being in the universe, but God himself, he devised a plan of redemption for the display of his glorious character. And as he had none to counsel and none to oppose him ; and as the plan was the result of boundless wisdom and benevolence ; we may safely conclude that it was at *first* perfectly pleasing to the Divine mind, and that it has *since* needed no alteration or amendment.

THE plan, in all its parts, being perfectly adjusted and invariably established in the purpose of God, the execution began with the commencement of time and the work of creation. This earth was formed and furnished as a theatre of action and probationary state for the subjects of redeeming grace.

As soon as the work of creation was performed, the wheels of Providence began to move ; and have ever since been moving according to the original design ; and will thus continue to move 'till time shall be no more, and the stupendous plan shall be completed.

VERY soon after the apostacy of Adam, the design of redemption was intimated ; and the light shone brighter and brighter through the successive periods of time, 'till the GREAT REDEEMER made his appearance in the likeness of man. Before and after the flood, down to the coming of the Messiah, Embassadors were commissioned from on high, to reclaim a wandering world and bring them back to God. And after the coming of Christ, Embassadors were multiplied and sent forth in his name ; and many subjects of redemption were persuaded to accept the terms of peace.

THE Apostle Paul, was not one of the first who went forth in the name of Christ ; but being a *chosen vessel*, he was called and authorized in due time. And *great* was his *fidelity*, *abundant* his *labors* and *glorious* his *success*—His usefulness was not confined to the age in which he lived ; but what he committed to writing, has been eminently serviceable to the church in succeeding generations down to the present day ; and probably will be so in future generations to the end of the world.

THE writings of this apostle are particularly serviceable with respect to illustrating the work of an Embassador for Christ. The *nature* and *design* of the gospel ministry are plainly suggested in the words of the text. *The ministry of reconciliation*. The natural implication of these terms shall be briefly illustrated, and then the way will be open for an instructive improvement.

THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION evidently suggests the idea of two parties at variance. Where there is no war, contention or discord, there is no room for reconciliation. And to institute a ministry of reconciliation in a kingdom, while there are no contending parties, would be needless and absurd. If then there be strict propriety in the apostle's use of the terms, they imply the existence of a war between God and man. For the ministry is of God's institution and men.

are the subjects to whom the Embassadors are sent:— And to suppose that God would institute such a ministry, if men were not really his enemies, would be a high reflexion upon his character.

BUT the humiliating idea suggested by the apostle is abundantly confirmed by almost every page in the Bible. We can scarcely look into the sacred writings without finding historical evidence, or express, or implied declarations that mankind are sinners, or rebels to Divine government. And we may have both *mental* and *ocular* demonstration of the same thing by an impartial survey of our own *hearts*, and the *conduct* of others with whom we are acquainted.

THE contest between God and man is, with respect to *supremacy*, who shall be the greatest, or who the supreme object of regard. The GREAT JEHOVAH, conscious of his own perfection, his importance, and his right to universal dominion, says, *I am God and there is none else*. Accordingly he requires mankind to love him with all the heart, in all things to submit to his will, and aim at his glory. But such is the pride of man, that he invades the rights of God, and is disposed to exalt himself above all which is called God: He refuses subjection to his government; loves himself supremely; sets up a private interest, in opposition to the authority of Jehovah and the good of his kingdom; and in heart and in practice assumes nearly the same stile with God himself, *I am, and there is none besides me* *

THESE are the *parties* to which our text refers; and such is the nature of the controversy. And as mankind have become enemies to God, they have become obnoxious to his wrath; liable to suffer the penalty of the law—the *vengeance of eternal fire*.

* Isaiah xlvii. 10.

THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION also implies that *one* of the contending parties is disposed for peace—that he has some way devised in his own mind, in which he is willing reconciliation should take place—that he is inclined to make proposals to the opposite party ; and that he hath authorized Embassadors to treat with them. All this would be naturally expected, should an earthly sovereign institute a ministry of reconciliation with reference to a party of revolted subjects. And all this is true with respect to the case before us. God is disposed for peace—he has devised a method in which reconciliation may take place consistently with his own honour ; the general good of his kingdom ; and the benefit of every rebel who will comply ; and he is disposed to communicate this intelligence to the guilty sons of men ; and for this purpose he authorizes Embassadors to publish the glad tidings of peace.

To open a way, for honorable and consistent proposals of peace, he has given his own Son a sacrifice for the sins of the world. *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.* And by this sacrifice an all-sufficient atonement is made ; the authority of God is established ; mercy and truth meet together ; righteousness and peace embrace each other ; while pardon and salvation are bestowed on the guilty and ill-deserving.

By the atonement, God hath both manifested his disposition for peace and opened a way in which reconciliation may consistently take place ; in which he can be, and appear to be, *a just God and a Saviour.* And upon this footing he hath issued his proclamation : *He! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters ; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat ; yea, come buy*

wine and milk, without money and without price—Come, for all things are now ready.

AND all which he requires on the sinner's part, is, that he should lay down the weapons of his rebellion; feel and confess the guilty part he has acted; acknowledge the excellency of the Divine character and government; submit himself to God; embrace the Lord Jesus in the character of Mediator; enlist under his banner; and be an obedient subject to the righteous government of the KING of Kings: All which is implied in *repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*

THESE are the terms upon which the MOST HIGH proposes full pardon and perfect restoration to his revolted subjects. Upon these terms he proposes, not only exemption from the penal curses of the Divine law; but to receive them into his family and make them sharers in all the riches, glory and felicity of his eternal kingdom.

IN all cases of controversy in order to reconciliation, something must be given upon one side or the other, or on both. If both parties have been in the fault, something may be conceded by each. If but one of the parties is blameable, propriety requires that all the concessions should be made by the *offender* to the *offended*.

IN the controversy between God and man, there is fault on one side only. God has done no wrong. His character remains unspotted; his law was always rectitude itself; and perfect equity has governed all his conduct towards mankind. Notwithstanding all the *insults* and *provocations* he has received, he has never done any thing unbecoming his character as GOD and KING. But mankind have done wrong—have done injuriously by God, and are wholly in the fault. And as God has a just view of the nature of the controversy, and his own importance; and as he is able to support his own character; if ever a reconciliation takes place between

him, and any of his enemies, *they* must acknowledge that *HIS* ways are *equal* and that *their* ways are *unequal*. For God is fixed in this, that *he will not give his glory to another*. Hence what God has done to effect a reconciliation, is not to be considered as an acknowledgment of blame on his own part; but as expressive of his boundless condescension and grace towards such as deserve his eternal displeasure.

To perform the ministry of reconciliation, God hath seen fit to choose his Embassadors from among the human race. Those whom he elects for this purpose, he first *qualifies*, and then *commissions*. From him they derive all their authority; and they are sacredly bound to follow his instructions.

ON the whole, then, we come naturally to this conclusion—that it is the *great design* of the gospel ministry to reclaim the enemies of God from their unreasonable revolt; and to bring them into a state of friendship and cordial subjection to his government.

THIS view of the *nature* and *design* of the gospel ministry opens the way for some important inferences.

I. WE may infer some things which will naturally be regarded in a proper execution of the ministerial office.

If the design of the gospel ministry be, to reclaim the enemies of Divine government and to bring them to reconciliation with God, it will be very natural for an Embassador to endeavour to convince mankind of their true characters as *enemies* to God, and to shew them the unreasonableness and danger of their opposition; For, until this be done, there is no probability of their feeling as they ought to feel, respecting the offers of pardon and peace. For, those who think themselves whole, see no need of a physician; those who view their state as safe, see no need of a city of refuge; and those who are insensible of guilt, see no grace in an offer of pardon.

BUT that the sinner may have a just view of his own character, his guilt and danger ; the true character of God, the nature and extent of his law, and the righteousness of his administrations must be displayed.

THE DIVINE CHARACTER will therefore be exhibited to view, as implying boundless perfection and excellency ; infinite, eternal and immutable wisdom, power, and love—The love of God will be explained as pure and impartial benevolence ; implying the attributes of mercy and truth, righteousness and peace, justice and grace, compassion and vengeance.

THE law of God will be illustrated as holy, just and good : *Holy*, as it respects our duty to God : *just*, as it respects our duty to our neighbours and ourselves ; and *good*, as it respects the interest of the GRAND COMMUNITY of the UNIVERSE : and *this*, while it requires mankind to love God with all the heart, soul, mind and strength, and their neighbours as themselves ; upon the dreadful penalty of endless destruction—The law will be explained as extending, not merely to the *visible conduct* of mankind, but to the desires of the heart ; forbidding every degree of pride or selfish affection, and requiring that every desire of the heart should be pure and impartial, having the divine glory for its ultimate object. By such a view of the law, is the knowledge of sin.

AND in a view of the excellency of the Divine character, and the perfect equity of the law, the righteousness of the Divine administrations may be shewn ; particularly the justice of God in the destruction of transgressors. If the law be righteous, it may in righteousness be fully executed.

WHEN these things are clearly displayed, the way will be open, to shew the sinner his true character ; and to make him consciously feel that he is in truth an enemy to God ; verily guilty of the most vile and unreasonable conduct ; and deserving of the threatened damn-

ation. His conscience will justify God and condemn himself. And while he is plainly told that he is in the hands of a justly offended God, as clay in the hand of the potter, he may see, that his state is infinitely *dangerous* as well as infinitely *criminal*.

Now the unsearchable riches of Divine grace in opening the way for pardon and reconciliation, may be illustrated to advantage. And the minister who observes propriety in preaching, will not fail to illustrate the boundless grace and condescension of God, in providing a way of salvation, in the most striking manner, which his capacity will admit. He will clearly shew that it is merely of grace that any way is provided for the pardon of sin, or the salvation of the sinner—that the way which God hath opened is truly glorious; just to himself and gracious to his enemies; that the provision is inexhaustible, and the proclamation free for persons of every age and every distinction.

BUT those who neglect to give a just description of the character and government of God; the guilt and ill desert of the sinner, never preach the gospel with propriety, never illustrate Divine grace to advantage.—For there is no grace in the gospel, unless sinners deserve the penalty of the law. And in the same proportion as we *extenuate* the guilt and ill-desert of the sinner, we *depreciate* the grace of the gospel. Preaching the law is therefore necessarily implied in preaching the gospel, and those who neglect the *former*, neglect the *latter*.

THE nature of reconciliation on the part of the sinner, is another thing which must be carefully explained, and forcibly urged. The sinner must be plainly told, to what he must be reconciled; and what will be the natural fruits of a reconciled temper.—That he must be reconciled to the true character and government of God, with all the glory and all the terror; to his divine designs of saving and destroying, as seemeth good in his

fight ; to Christ, in the character of Mediator in all his offices, as Prophet, Priest and King ; to the terms of salvation as perfectly reasonable and infinitely gracious. Sinners must be taught that reconciliation implies, not merely a speculative belief of things pertaining to divine government ; but a cordial approbation of them. *For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness.* Here great care will be taken to distinguish moral character by *desires* or *affections* ; and *these* will be distinguished by their *ultimate ends* and *genuine fruits*. True religion, or reconciliation, will be delineated as *first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.*

IN this place, it may be proper to observe another reason for the necessity of a clear and just display of the character and government of God. *These* are the objects to which sinners must become reconciled. And if these be misrepresented, there is awful danger, that the sinner will make a fatal mistake ; by thinking that he is reconciled to God and his government, while it is only a *false idea* of these objects to which he is reconciled.

NOTHING is more certain than this, that sinners do really hate the true character of God. If this be not the case, *Christ is dead in vain* ; and the ministry of reconciliation is vain. But it is an easy matter to give a description of the character and government of God, with which the sinner will be pleased ; without any change in his temper. And much may be said about God which is literally true, without giving a just view of his character. Hearers may be told that God is *love* and that his love flows out in streams of *grace* and *mercy*, in saving sinners. This is all true ; but it is a very partial description of God's moral character : For his love is *sovereign love*, it makes great distinctions : while it is displayed in streams of *mercy* and *grace* in saving *some*, it at the same time flows out in streams of

justice and vengeance towards others. And the *justice* and *vengeance* of God are as essential to his character, as his *mercy* and *grace*. And in giving a description of his moral character, we may as safely omit the *latter* as the *former*, and *both*, as *either*.

THE nature of reconciliation being explained, the sinner will be urged to a speedy compliance : And the Embassador who faithfully and understandingly preaches the gospel, will not, in his mode of directing sinners, allow them to continue in impenitency, any longer than he thinks it is reasonable that they should continue to *hate* God ; *oppose* his righteous government ; and *despise* the messages of his grace. Consequently, it may be expected, that he will urge repentance, without delay. For, he must be sensible that every sinner whom he addresses, has sinned long enough already ; and that when he has sinned long enough, it is time to repent. And while he considers the sinner's obligations to God, he will be sensible that he cannot delay repentance, without adding sin to sin.

GREAT care will also be taken, that nothing be said, which implies that God is, in the least degree, faulty, hard or unreasonable, in his demands of the sinner. Consequently as great care will be taken that nothing be said, which implies that the sinner is in any degree excusable for continuing impenitent : For there is fault in the case somewhere. Either God is faulty in his demands of the sinner ; or the sinner is to blame in not complying. And just as much as the *sinner* is *excused*, just so much *God* is *blamed*.

IN urging the duty of repentance, the faithful minister will bring into view, all the motives he can produce, both good and evil ; from *life* and *death* ; *blessing* and *cursing*, *probation* and *judgment*, *time* and *eternity*, *heaven* and *hell*.

AND, as sinners are disposed to justify themselves, and *pray to be excused*, it becomes not only proper, but

necessary, for a minister to answer their self-justifying pleas, in a rational and convincing manner.

As they plead *inability*, he will shew that their *inability* and their *opposition* to God, are one and the same thing; and that this is so far from being a reasonable excuse, that it is the *very* thing, the *ONLY* thing for which they are to blame.

If they urge their dependence upon God, their dependence must be acknowledged; at the same time, it must be shewn, that this is so far from *lessening*, that it *increases* their obligation to obedience; agreeably to the words of the apostle, *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: FOR it is God who worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure.* Here *absolute dependence* is urged as a reason for *active obedience*.

WHEN the wise and faithful Embassador sees any alarmed with a sense of danger, and enquiring how they shall escape from the wrath which is to come, he will carefully avoid suggesting any thing, which will lead them to think, that God is, or will be pleased with any thing short of true repentance. He will carefully distinguish between selfish and godly sorrow—he will urge their increased obligations to give their hearts to God; the sufficiency of Christ's atonement; his readiness to receive all who cordially repent; the rectitude of God's purpose; the propriety of unreserved submission, and the aggravated ruin, which awaits those who continue to resist the HOLY GHOST.

THOSE who have, or shall become reconciled, are still to be considered as subjects of the watchman's care. And much is to be said to them, lest they turn aside from the holy commandment, and become ensnared by the stratagems of the adversary. They are to be comforted and encouraged by the great and precious promises of the gospel. The paths of wisdom are to be set before them. They are to be urged by all interesting motives to press forward in the way of self-denial, and quit

themselves like men. They must also be warned of the danger of rejoining the enemies of the Lord, and faithfully reprov'd for all their declensions.

BUT as many profess *reconciliation*, who still remain *obstinate*, the character of a true penitent must be strictly described, and the *clean* and the *unclean* clearly distinguished. And, as many deluded mortals are disposed to place the essence of religion in the observance of a few ceremonies, it is needful that a minister should plainly shew, that to be a friend to God, is to be like God; to be a Christian, is to be like Christ, in temper or affection; and that a disposition to do good and communicate, is inseparable from true religion.

THOSE who faithfully execute the ministerial office, do not shun to declare the *whole* counsel of God. For all the doctrines taught in the sacred writings are designed for the benefit of mankind: They all have a tendency to promote the design of the ministry. If they were not important in God's view, he would not have revealed them. And, if they are important in his view, we must either acknowledge them to be important in reality, or presume to be wiser than our Maker. And the Embassador, who would duly execute his office, must not shun to deal out ALL the truths of the gospel, as his hearers can bear them; keeping in view the design of the ministry, and applying every thing to that purpose—

BUT by *dealing out truths as hearers can bear them*, it is not intended, that a minister should preach nothing which is displeasing to his hearers: His study should not be what will be *palatable*, but what will be *profitable*. If a minister make it his study to preach nothing that will be displeasing to his hearers, he may be sure that his mode of preaching is offensive to God. However, a minister may, in preaching the most interesting truths, by an imprudent manner of *timing* and *expressing*, subvert the very design of his ministry.

SOME of the doctrines of the gospel are more difficult than others, to illustrate, with propriety and advantage. In treating of those subjects which are difficult, great pains should be taken to illustrate them in a *scriptural* and *rational* manner. A minister should not content himself with bare *declarations* that things are *so*, but he should *prove* his declarations and *shew the fitness and propriety* of them; he should clear his subjects from the objections which sinners produce against them, and shew the consistency of one doctrine with another; for truths will bear comparison.

IN treating of the *sovereignty of God*, he should clear it from the idea of *tyranny* and *unreasonableness*. While he declares it to be *absolute*, he should illustrate it, as perfectly *wise, impartial, just and gracious*—He should not lead people to think, that God claims a right as a Sovereign to do any thing, which is in its own nature *wrong*. Nor that what God does is *right*, because he does it; But that he does as he does, because it is right, fitting, and on the whole best so to do.

WHEN he disourses upon *Divine predestination* respecting all things, past, present and future, he will evince the consistency of this, with *free agency* in mankind; by shewing that free agency is among the things, which God decreed should take place—that God as really decreed that men should *choose their own ways*, as he did that they should be *rewarded according to their deeds*; or as he did any thing else respecting their present or future circumstances.

AND while he holds up to view the universality of Divine providence, or a divine efficiency in the production of all events; he should carefully illustrate, that this is so far from being inconsistent with free agency in men, that it is by *divine efficiency* that *free agency* is produced. And that it is absolutely impossible, in the nature of things, that there should be any free agency in creatures independent of Divine efficiency; as impossible

as that an effect should take place without a cause. And here it should also be made to appear, what a reasonable and desirable thing it is, that the government and disposal of all things should be in the hands of God; since he is so *able* and so *willing* to dispose all things in the best possible manner; what a firm foundation this doctrine affords, for comfort and unshaken confidence in the Lord; what support it must give to all the friends of God, amidst the evils and calamities which attend them in this present state; and what a powerful motive it implies for sinners to become reconciled unto God. *

* What is here advanced respecting the extent of Divine agency, will probably wound the feelings of some pious Christians: For I charitably suppose there are many good people who think that some events have taken place contrary to the original design of JEHOVAH, and independent of Divine efficiency. That such persons may not fail of *seeing* and *feeling* the importance of the sentiment which they oppose, the following things are proposed for their serious consideration.

1. Whether that by endeavouring to maintain that some things have taken place without Divine efficiency, they do not implicitly give up the foundation of all religion, both *natural* and *revealed*, by giving up all the ground upon which we prove the existence of a SUPREME ETERNAL GOD.

To prove the fundamental doctrine, we have recourse to these dictates of reason; That every thing which has a beginning, has a cause—that no change can take place in any being or thing, without a cause—that every cause which is not eternal, is itself the effect of some prior cause—that secondary causes are absolutely dependent on a first cause for all their power to operate—that the first cause must be eternal, because it could not *begin* to exist, without a cause, and there could be no *prior cause* to give existence to the *first cause*. Upon these principles it is, that *the invisible things of God from the foundation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his ETERNAL POWER AND GODHEAD*. And on these principles we may infallibly prove the Divine existence, from any effect we can perceive, whether *external* or *internal*: From things which are *small*, as well as from things which are *great*; from the existence of the smallest insect, the shaking of a leaf, from a thought of the mind or desire of the heart, as well as from the whole material system.

But if I should say, that one event, or one thing may take place independent of Divine efficiency, who will venture to set the bounds where I may consistently stop; or draw for me the line of distinction between events which take place by Divine efficiency, and those which take place independent of God? If one event may take place, without Divine efficiency, why not two, ten, or ten thousand? And why may not all things be accounted for in the same manner?

IN discourses upon the *original apostacy* of our first parents, and the *consequences* of it, as they respect their posterity, care should be taken that the subject be not handled in such a manner, as to place Adam as a *pillow*, on which his posterity may rest their guilty heads. To avoid this, it should be explained, that, notwithstanding our relation to Adam as our *first parent*, or as a *public representative* by Divine constitution; yet we, his posterity, act as freely, and consequently are as criminal, in all our disobedience, as though no such relation subsisted. And that every one must give account of *himself* unto God, and be rewarded according to the *deeds done in the body*.

THE *necessity of regeneration* he will ground solely upon the sinner's opposition to God: And make it appear, that were it not for his being a voluntary enemy to God, to holiness, to Christ and the terms of salvation, there would be no need of his being born again, in order to his seeing the kingdom of God.

TREATING these difficult subjects in such a manner, naturally tends to convince of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, and to promote the great design of the ministry.

He who can demonstrate that one event has been produced without Divine agency, will meet with no difficulty to invalidate every argument which can be advanced in proof of the being of a God. And he who denies the universality of Divine operation, has not, that I can see, an inch of ground left upon which he can consistently dispute an Atheist.

2. The three following things will be granted by all judicious christians, viz. That it is our duty to acknowledge the hand of God, either by gratitude or submission, in every favor we receive, and every affliction we suffer by *Divine providence*—that many of our favors and afflictions come, through the instrumentality of moral agents,—and that we are incapable of looking into the hearts of men to determine the nature of their designs, whether good or evil. Unless then, we believe that the hearts of *all men*, at *all times* are in the hand of the Lord, and by him turned whithersoever he will, must we not be forever at a loss whether to acknowledge the hand of God or not, in the favors we receive and the afflictions we suffer by the agency of our fellow creatures?

MOREOVER, it is highly important, and agreeable to the design of the ministry, that an Embassador should preach in an *intelligible manner* : not merely intelligible to himself, but to those who hear him. This cannot be done, unless language be accommodated to the capacity of the hearers. A minister may, with as much propriety, and as much probability of doing good ; deliver his discourses to an English audience, in *Hebrew, Greek or Latin*, as in *English language*, which his hearers do not understand. In either case he is but a *Barbarian* to those who sit under his ministry. He may indeed excite admiration, and gain the applause, of those, who pay more regard to *sound* than *sense* ; and are better pleased with what they *do not* understand, than with what they *do* : But his method of preaching must be despised by all judicious persons, who are friendly to the design of the ministry. And it is worthy of serious consideration, whether such a *manner* can be pleasing to Christ, while it has no tendency to promote the design of his sending forth his Embassadors.

BUT *intelligible preaching* implies more than barely using words, with which the hearers are acquainted. The use of words is to communicate ideas. But words may be used without ideas : And this is too often the case in preaching. No preaching can be called intelligible, unless ideas are thereby communicated, to the minds of attentive hearers.

To preach *intelligibly*, also implies, such a plain and distinguishing mode of address, that hearers can tell, whether the preacher is speaking *to* some who are present, or *about* some who are absent. The faithful preacher will endeavor to address the hearts and consciences of his hearers, in such an intelligible and distinguishing manner, that they shall severally feel, according to their respective characters, as David did, when Nathan said, *Thou art the man*. FOR IF THE TRUMPET GIVE AN UNCERTAIN SOUND, WHO SHALL PREPARE HIMSELF FOR THE BATTLE ?

We may add; from the nature and design of the ministry, it appears important, that an Ambassador should deliver his messages in a *solemn* and *fervent* manner. If those subjects, which immediately concern the glory of God, the interest of the Divine Kingdom, and the eternal welfare of the souls of men do not require *solemnity* and *fervency*, there are none which do. It must be evident to every thinking and judicious person, that a *light* and *trifling*, or a *cold* and *lifeless* manner of preaching the gospel, is a great offence against propriety. It is very true, that it is the *matter* delivered, which ought to engage the minds of hearers: And that they ought to receive the truth with love, in whatever dress it may be communicated. But fact and experience testify, that a *solemn* and *fervent* manner of speaking, is best calculated to impress divine truths upon the minds of men. And let a minister realize the majesty and glory of the OMNIPRESENT GOD, the endless consequences of his preaching, as they respect himself and his hearers, the importance of the Divine interest; the worth and danger of the souls of men; the probability of the sinner's final ruin; and the uncertainty, but that the next call from God, will place him at the Divine tribunal, and he will not want for motives to excite both *solemnity* and *fervency*.

HOWEVER, zeal, without knowledge; noise, without instruction; and boisterous addresses to the passions of men, while the heart and conscience are neglected, are modes in preaching, which we cannot with propriety recommend.

II. We may infer the qualifications, which are requisite for a gospel minister.

If the gospel ministry, is the ministry of reconciliation, it is obvious that an Ambassador should be one, who is reconciled himself. If the scriptures were silent about qualifications, this would be evident from the design of the ministry. In case of a rebellion in civil

government, how absurd it would appear to employ one of the rebels, while unreconciled, as an Embassador to reclaim others. The probability would be, that he would betray his trust, and do sevenfold more mischief than good. He might, from hopes of private advantage, put on a shew of fidelity; but he never could *cordially* and *consistently* recommend to others, that which he is at heart opposed to himself. And it would not be probable, that even the *appearance* of fidelity would long continue. And if he were a very learned and knowing man, this would rather increase than diminish the danger. These observations are equally applicable to the gospel ministry, for this also is the ministry of reconciliation. Therefore, a heart reconciled to Divine government, is to be considered as a qualification, absolutely requisite for a gospel minister. And a graceless gospel minister, is to be considered as a *monster of inconsistency*.

BUT a heart reconciled to God, is not the *only* requisite qualification. Every good subject of civil government, is not fit to be employed as a public Embassador. It requires a man of *genius* and *knowledge*; and the same are requisite for an Embassador for Christ. And the greater his genius, and the more extensive his knowledge, the better. An acquaintance with the learned languages, arts and sciences, is a desirable attainment. But an acquaintance with the character of God; the nature of his government; the nature of man; the nature of the controversy between God and man, and the word of reconciliation, is absolutely essential. The gospel minister, then, must be a *scribe, well instructed unto the kingdom of heaven*.

HE must also be capable of communicating his knowledge to others. For, however much he may know, he cannot be profitable as an instructor, unless he be *apt to teach*.

BESIDES, he should be a man possessed of the virtues of *meekness, patience, humility, prudence, sobriety, hospitality* and *fortitude*. Each of these must appear necessary, from the design of his work ; from the character of Christ, who sends him ; and the character of men, to whom he is sent. These virtues should all be exemplified in his life and deportment. For it will be very difficult for him, to make his hearers believe, that he loves those things which he practically opposes ; or that he views those virtues, to be very important for *others*, while his daily conduct evidences that he does not view them to be important for *himself*.

III. WE may learn the manner in which gospel ministers, and their messages, should be treated and received. GIVE HONOR, TO WHOM HONOR IS DUE, is the law of nature, as well as the revealed law of God. And, that which is done to an EMBASSADOR, is considered as done to the KING, by whom he is sent. This is the case in civil governments, and that it is so in the divine, we are assured from good authority : For Christ hath expressly declared to his Embassadors, *he that receiveth you, receiveth me ; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me. And he that despiseth you, despiseth me ; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.* It is therefore evident, that gospel ministers should be treated with *reverence*.

AND from the design of their ministry, it appears that they should be treated with *kindness*. Every thing should be treated according to its nature : And the design of the ministry is a *kind* design.

ALTHOUGH Christ's ministers sustain a high office, yet they are *men*. And people should not look for more in a *minister*, than can be found in *man*.

It is reasonably expected of all, who are friendly to the design of the ministry, that they will be abundant in their prayers to God for his Embassadors : For their work is a great and difficult work, and they stand in

government, how absurd it would appear to employ one of the rebels, while unreconciled, as an Ambassador to reclaim others. The probability would be, that he would betray his trust, and do sevenfold more mischief than good. He might, from hopes of private advantage, put on a shew of fidelity; but he never could *cordially* and *consistently* recommend to others, that which he is at heart opposed to himself. And it would not be probable, that even the *appearance* of fidelity would long continue. And if he were a very learned and knowing man, this would rather increase than diminish the danger. These observations are equally applicable to the gospel ministry, for this also is the ministry of reconciliation. Therefore, a heart reconciled to Divine government, is to be considered as a qualification, absolutely requisite for a gospel minister. And a graceless gospel minister, is to be considered as a *monster of inconsistency*.

BUT a heart reconciled to God, is not the *only* requisite qualification. Every good subject of civil government, is not fit to be employed as a public Ambassador. It requires a man of *genius* and *knowledge*; and the same are requisite for an Ambassador for Christ. And the greater his genius, and the more extensive his knowledge, the better. An acquaintance with the learned languages, arts and sciences, is a desirable attainment. But an acquaintance with the character of God; the nature of his government; the nature of man; the nature of the controversy between God and man, and the word of reconciliation, is absolutely essential. The gospel minister, then, must be a *scribe, well instructed unto the kingdom of heaven*.

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It is reasonably expected of all, who are friendly to the design of the ministry, that they will be abundant in their prayers to God for his Embassadors: For their work is a great and difficult work, and they stand in

special need of Divine assistance. And all their success depends upon the blessing of God. *For except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh, but in vain.*

AND as a minister is, in a greater or less degree, dependent on his hearers for temporal support, this should be a matter to which they should particularly attend. Profitably to preach the gospel, requires much study; and it cannot be reasonably expected, that in ordinary cases, a minister will be long profitable to a people, unless he be, in a considerable measure, freed from worldly embarrassments. Those who, in a benevolent manner, contribute to the necessities of their minister, may expect, if he be a good man, that the happy fruits of their generosity will be returning weekly into their own bosoms. But those who are negligent, may expect to fare as covetous and ignorant farmers, who by *half-keeping* their cattle, lose the *profits* both of *labor* and *growth*. It is written, *thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn.* Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes no doubt, says the Apostle. And he further adds upon the same subject, *let him that is taught in the word, communicate to him, that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived: God is not mocked: That which a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; and he that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting.* In the light of this passage, many people may see a sufficient reason why they profit so little by the preached gospel.

WITH respect to the manner in which gospel messages should be received; this also may be learnt from the design of the ministry: For messages should be received with tempers correspondent to their nature and design. It is therefore evident, that gospel messages should be received in a friendly, penitent, humble, thankful and joyful manner.

IN duly hearing the gospel preached, is implied an openness to conviction, and a desire to know the true state of the soul. And people should be much upon their guard, lest they be offended at the truth : For truth is precious, and it will either raise the soul to heaven, or sink it deep in hell.

PEOPLE should *take heed* how they bear, and *WHAT they bear* : And hear in a distinguishing manner, for good ministers may communicate some errors ; and there are such creatures as *Wolves in Sheep's clothing*, good discourses may contain some gross errors ; and bad discourses may contain some important truths. The whole should be tried by the unerring standard, the *wheat* should be cordially received, and the *chaff* rejected.

A *solemn* and *attentive* manner of hearing, is also very becoming, and very important. For God is present as a Witness, and he is jealous for his name ; hearers must give account at his bar ; and what they hear will be to them *a savor of life unto life, or of death unto death*.

AN *unprejudiced* manner of hearing, is also very necessary. For prejudice does by the hearers of the gospel, much as the Jews did by Christ ; first it *blind-folds* and then says, *prophecy*.

FINALLY a disposition to reduce good instruction to practice. This all must grant, is not only important, but essential to a right manner of hearing messages from God : For they are not the *bearers* of the word, but the *doers* thereof, who are justified and blessed.

OTHER inferences might be drawn and illustrated ; but some addresses, correspondent to the present occasion, demand the remainder of our time.

REVEREND FATHERS AND BRETHREN,

As we are especially concerned in the application and improvement of this subject, permit me, with becoming deference, to propose a few enquiries for our consciences to answer on this solemn occasion.

HAVE we in reality viewed and treated the gospel ministry, as the ministry of reconciliation? Did we enter upon the work, from love to God's injured character, and compassion for the souls of men? And has our preaching been correspondent to the design of the ministry?

HAVE our hearers a witness in their own breasts, that we have faithfully pleaded the cause of God? that the divine character and government have been truly displayed and vindicated? and that the sinner's guilt, ill-desert and danger have been fairly set before him? Do they know that, if our preaching be true, all men by nature are really enemies to God, and that, as such, they are exposed to endless ruin? Or have we prophesied smooth things, flattered the sinner's pride, and left our hearers in the dark, both as to God's character and their own?

HAVE we properly illustrated the grace of God through the GREAT REDEEMER? Or are our hearers still in ignorance respecting the gospel, whether it be of *grace* or of *debt*? Have we preached with that clearness, that our hearers are acquainted with the nature of reconciliation; and the real difference between the *saint* and the *sinner*? Or do we make little or no difference between the *clean* and the *unclean*?

HAVE we urged the importance of repentance, agreeably to the example of Christ; exhibiting the great *eternal motives* both of HEAVEN and HELL? Or have we set up our *own* wisdom, in opposition to HIS; devised a milder mode of preaching; and *winked hell out of sight*?

HAVE we enforced good instructions, by being examples of believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith and in purity? Or have we *preached* RECONCILIATION, and by our *practice* encouraged REBELLION? Let us now listen to the voice of conscience, and remember that God is greater.

If we have been faithful Embassadors for Christ, it is beyond the tongue of mortals, to describe the glory and felicity, which await us in the coming world: But if we have acted the selfish part, and sacrificed the divine interest to our own, how shall we be able to stand before our KING and our JUDGE? How can we *escape*, or how can we *endure* the curse of the Lord, for doing his work deceitfully?

DEAR BROTHER,

You are about to receive a solemn charge, before God and Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing, to perform a work, which is at once, the most difficult, and the most important, of any which ever engaged the mind of man.

A multitude of souls are to be committed to your care; each of whom is of more worth than all the treasures of the east. You are to act the part of an Embassador for Christ. Your ministry is the ministry of reconciliation. And the consequences of your conduct, as they respect yourself and your hearers, will be as lasting as eternity.

If you should prove unfaithful, the blood of multitudes will be required at your hands, will rise in judgment against you and cry for vengeance. But if you have undertaken this work from love to God and the souls of men, as we charitably hope; and if you should prove faithful to your trust, the most glorious reward will be the fruit of your labors: You will be *unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in those who are saved and in those who perish.*

ARE you ready to cry out, *who is sufficient for these things?* Listen to the voice of the KING—MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR THEE. Here then fix your trust, gird up your loins and boldly plead the cause of God.

NEVER lose sight of the design of your ministry, nor of the importance of a faithful execution of your office. Let the honor of the KING of Kings lie near your heart, and let every other interest be kept in due subordination

EVER realize that the GREAT ALL-DISCERNING JEHOVAH will be a constant attendant on your ministry. While in the pulpit, he will be one of your hearers. At home and abroad he will be your impartial observer. And let it be your unremitting care, so to *preach* and so to *live*, as to insure his approbation.

BE clothed with humility; and suffer not the applause, nor the reproach of men to turn you aside from following the instructions of your King.

ARM yourself with *meekness, patience and fortitude*; for you may expect *opposition, trials and conflicts*.

LET Christ be your pattern in preaching and practice. Evidence by your deportment that you are in reality on the Lord's side; that you believe the truths you deliver, and delight in the duties you enjoin. This will give you boldness in speaking and add *weight* to your instructions.

DEVOTE yourself wholly to the ministry. Be greatly acquainted with the word of reconciliation. Be abundant in prayer for the gracious influences of the divine Spirit, upon yourself and your hearers. And let your profiting appear to all.

AND may God grant that you may be extensively useful in life, sublimely happy in death, and eminently glorious in his TEMPLE above.

THE CHURCH and CONGREGATION in this town will suffer us to say, that while we rejoice with you, in the happy prospect of re-settling the gospel ministry, we at the same time beseech you to consider that it is the *ministry of reconciliation*.

RECEIVE him, who is now to take the charge of your souls, as an Ambassador for Christ. And duly to receive him, you must cordially receive the King on whose embassy he is sent.

ATTEND his ministry diligently, penitently, impartially and solemnly. Lay yourselves open to conviction. Be willing to become truly acquainted with the Divine character, and your own hearts. Never account

him your enemy for telling you the truth. Never *rashly* censure any thing he may deliver, lest haply you be found fighting against God, and rejecting the truth, to the ruin of your souls. But, like the noble Bereans, search the scriptures to see whether the things be so.

His usefulness depends greatly upon your treatment of him. Treat him then with *reverence* as an EMBASSADOR, and with *tenderness*, as a MAN. Let his character be ever precious in your esteem. In a friendly and faithful manner remind him of his faults; and not suffer the tongue of slander to publish them abroad. Strive, by kindness and friendship, to encourage his heart and strengthen his hands: And let him daily experience the benefit of your humble prayers. Never be found among the ungodly crew, who spend seven-fold more time and breath, in defaming their ministers, than they do in praying for them.

He is but a youth: And the disadvantages, with respect to education, under which he enters upon the work of the ministry, demand both your candor and your kindness. He has a mind capable of improvement; and it is for your interest to give him opportunity for that purpose.

If you support him in the generous manner which you have proposed, we trust you will receive a recompense of reward as you attend on his ministrations: But if you become cold and inattentive with respect to his support; and oblige him to leave his studies to provide the necessities of life; you may expect that his improvements will be small, and your profiting in proportion. *If you sow sparingly you will reap also sparingly.*

CULTIVATE the spirit of unity: For discord and animosity tend greatly to embarrass the mind of a minister and to prevent his success.

FREQUENTLY meditate on the solemn day in which you and your MINISTER must stand before the *judgment seat* of CHRIST. And let all your conduct towards him, be governed by a wise reference to the account you

must then give. This is wisdom as well as duty : For duty here and happiness hereafter are inseparably connected.

THIS NUMEROUS ASSEMBLY will be pleased to accept the closing address.

You are now convened to be spectators of a solemn and affecting scene—The ordination of an Ambassador for Christ to perform the ministry of reconciliation. With what self-abasement should we reflect on the necessity of such a ministry ! And with what gratitude should we acknowledge the grace of God in the institution !

REMEMBER, my fellow mortals, that HE who is now sending forth his Ambassadors, will one day be *revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who obey not the gospel.* In that solemn day each member of this assembly ; together with a multitude which no man can number, will stand before his dread tribunal. *For all who are in their graves shall hear his voice, and come forth, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.* Then the gospel trumpet will sound no more ; and the ministry of reconciliation will be at an end. *He that is filthy will be filthy still, and he that is holy will be holy still.* A final and endless separation will be made between those who have *embraced*, and those who have *despised* the message of heavenly love.

Now is your time of probation. Salvation is freely offered to *one* and to *all*. And the fruit and consequence of your own choice, will be your eternal portion. *He who believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he who believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.*

NOW, THEN, WE ARE EMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST, AS THOUGH GOD DID BESEECH YOU BY US, WE PRAY YOU IN CHRIST'S STEAD, BE YE RECONCILED TO GOD.—AS WORKERS TOGETHER WITH HIM, WE BESEECH YOU, THAT YE RECEIVE NOT THE GRACE OF GOD IN VAIN.

The C H A R G E,

BY THE REVEREND

Mr. W O O D, of BOSCAWEN.

YOU are now, dear Sir, an Ordained Minister of the gospel, and Pastor of the flock of God in this place. We, therefore, Charge you, before the all-seeing God, and our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead, at his appearing, and kingdom.

Take heed to the ministry, which you have received in the Lord.—Give yourself wholly to this sacred work.

In doing which, take heed to thyself; be blameless as the steward of God. In all things, shew thyself a pattern of good works—in repentance—in faith—in love to God—to Christ, and to the souls of men. Flee also youthful lusts, and follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord, out of a pure heart.

Take heed to the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you an overseer—to feed the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood; feeding Christ's sheep, and his lambs; not lording it over God's heritage.

Preach the word; be instant in season—out of season—reprove—rebuke—exhort, with all long-suffering, and doctrine.

Watch thou in all things—endure afflictions—do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

Administer the sacraments of the new testament, to such only as have a visible right to the same, agreeably to the rules of Christ's house; making a difference between the precious and the vile.

Use your influence to maintain a strict and holy discipline in the Church of Christ; for, as he, who hath called us, is holy, so it becometh his professed followers to be holy as he is holy, in all manner of conversation and godliness.

Take heed to your doctrine—that it be sound speech, which cannot be condemned: For this purpose, take the sacred Oracles for your guide—give attendance to reading—meditation and prayer; that your profiting may appear to all, and you be a happy instrument of saving both yourself, and them who hear you.

Keep in view, dear Sir, that you are to watch for souls, as one who must give account. Be faithful unto death, and you shall receive a crown of life.

Should you be called, with others, to commit this office to any man, remember the caution of the Apostle, lay hands suddenly on no man. Keep thyself pure, by committing the same to faithful men, who are able to teach others.

And now, dear Sir, go forth in the name of the King of Kings. Take to yourself the whole armour of God. Endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Fight the good fight of faith. Rely on this gracious promise of your Divine Master—Lo! I am with you alway, even to the end of the world.

A M E N.

RIGHT-HAND *of* FELLOWSHIP,

BY THE REVEREND

Mr. CHURCH, *of* CAMPTON.

THE Gospel lays a glorious foundation for a most refined and exalted friendship. A friendship, which affects the whole universe of intelligences. For it has been the great object of Divine attention from eternity. It excites, at once, the wonder and delight of angels and saints in heaven—the envy and rage of devils—the contempt and ridicule of infidels—the vain boast of hypocrites, and false professors—and the humble joy and most pleasing hopes of all the benevolent friends of Zion.

THE kind and condescending Prince of Peace, in carrying into execution the purposes of his rich grace and mercy, has commissioned embassadors from among men, to preach the glad tidings of peace to a rebel world—to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound. That those who are enemies to God, and his kingdom, through the alienation of their hearts, may return to a state of friendly subjection to his government. And that those who are enemies to one another, through divers lusts and pleasures which they are serving, or separate selfish interests, which they are pursuing, may cordially unite in that harmony of interest and affec-

tion, which constitutes the happiness of moral beings. In a word.—The great object of their embassy is, to promote, agreeably to the abilities with which they are endowed—the authority with which they are invested—and the rules by which they are instructed—the most pure, perfect, and permanent FRIENDSHIP.—*For it is the ministry of reconciliation.*

BUT all do not comply with the proposals of peace. The friends of Christ, therefore, have ever had, and are ever to expect, in this militant state, enemies from earth and hell, to oppose the friendly designs of their glorious Master. It therefore becomes Christ's ambassadors, in a special manner, to join hand in hand, as humble instruments, fellow-laborers, and determined soldiers, to carry into execution these benevolent designs of their exalted King.

GIVING the Right-hand, has been, perhaps, in all ages, a token of friendship among men. It is, indeed, a token which, in the common use of it, is often a mere empty, unmeaning ceremony. But, as it is adopted by the Holy Ghost, in reference to the ministerial work, it is a token full of important meaning, pleasing to the friends of Zion, *but terrible to her enemies, as an army with banners.* For, giving the Right-hand in this public and solemn manner, is expressive of our hearty welcome to a fellow-laborer into Christ's vineyard—of our friendly affection, and ministerial communion with each other—of our mutual dependence, under the great Captain of our Salvation, for friendly, gospel assistance, and of our united engagements, that, however the enemies of Christ's kingdom, apostles or false professors, may desert *us*, or the *cause of religion*, we will stand by each other in the great and common cause of our glorious Lord and Master.

WITH this view, by the desire, and in the name of this ecclesiastical Council, I give you, dear Sir, THE RIGHT HAND.

WE congratulate you, on your dedication of yourself to this great and good work. We bid you a hearty welcome into the vineyard of Christ. We cheerfully acknowledge you as a brother and fellow-laborer in the gospel: And we hereby solemnly pledge our covenant and ordination-vows, to afford you all reasonable gospel-assistance, in ministerial and christian communion, if you continue to walk in the faith and order of the gospel—and we expect the same from you.

MAY we ever walk hand in hand, in the self-denying, but pleasant paths of gospel-duty.

WE wish you much of the presence of our glorious Lord and Master. In all the trying scenes through which you may be called to pass, may you ever find his grace sufficient for you.

MAY you enjoy an early and glorious harvest of souls in this place. And may you be happily instrumental, not only in this place, but wherever God, in his providence, may call your labors, of turning many to righteousness; that when you have finished your course, and fulfilled your ministry, you may shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars forever and ever.

WE would also congratulate this Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, on the present joyful occasion. May this day's solemnity ever be matter of grateful reflection to you.

WE hope and trust, the Pastor whom we have seen placed over you, is a merciful grant of Him, who, when he ascended on high, received gifts for men.

LONG may he shine, illuminated by the Father of Lights, in this golden candlestick; and you have reason to rejoice in his light. May the great Head of divine influences, shed abroad his love in your hearts in copious effusions. May you ever experience how good

and how pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity.

AND may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will ; working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.

A M E N.

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